United Nations

Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General strongly condemns mortar attack on Spanish UNPROFOR troops in Jablenica; appeals to parties at Geneva peace talks to end war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to help bring perpetrators to justice.

- Co-Chairmen of Yugoslavia Conference meet with Bosnian Presidency in Geneva; talks to end war in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue on basis of proposals discussed yesterday.

- Special Rapporteur on human rights in former Yugoslavia warns that people in safe havens in Bosnia and Herzegovina are being drawn into "a catastrophe"; calls for urgent steps to make them secure.

- United Nations taking report on human rights abuses by UNOSOM II forces very seriously, spokesman says; action will be taken against those responsible if charges are true.

- Arusha peace talks between Government of Rwanda and Rwandese Patriotic Front end; agreement likely to be signed on 4 August.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has strongly condemned a mortar attack on a Spanish company serving with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Jablenica. One Spanish soldier was killed and 17 were wounded in the incident, which occurred early this morning.

The Secretary-General noted that it was the second time in less than a week that UNPROFOR had been the target of a vicious attack, and said it underlined the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He appealed to the leaders of the parties concerned to bring the Geneva peace talks to a speedy conclusion, and to help identify those who had committed the attack and to use their influence to bring them to justice. UNPROFOR was investigating the incident and would do everything in its power to establish the identity of the perpetrators, he stressed.

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Thorvald Stoltenberg and Lord Owen, Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, met today in Geneva with the Bosnian Presidency, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Bosnian Presidency had not rejected proposals discussed yesterday, he said, and the talks to end the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina were continuing on the basis of those proposals.

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Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur on human rights in the former Yugoslavia, has written to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali voicing fears for people living in "safe areas" in Bosnia and Herzegovina and displaced persons who have sought refuge with them. "I believe they are fast being drawn into a catastrophe, while their elementary human rights are constantly being violated," he warned.

"The purpose of establishing 'safe havens' was, inter alia, to provide displaced people with the food and medical supplies they need, in places where their security is guaranteed," Mr. Mazowiecki wrote. However, he went on to say, those supplies had become prime targets for the attacking parties. On 12 July, 12 people had been killed by direct fire from Bosnian Serb positions as they queued at a water-pump in the street in Sarajevo. Eighteen people were said to have died from mortar or sniper attacks since April 1992 while attempting to restore water supplies in the city. He also noted that the victims of the violence included relief workers, United Nations observers, drivers, interpreters and peace-keepers.

Mr. Mazoweicki stated that as much as one fifth of the food and medical supplies bound for the safe areas was failing to get through. People in Sarajevo were reported to be receiving only 60 per cent of the food they need.

Urgent steps were needed to make "safe areas" truly secure, such as the widening of their boundaries to make them economically viable, and the deployment of an adequate number of United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) troops with appropriate guidelines for the use of defensive force. "Even when hostilities end, the 'safe havens' will need special attention and help in their transition to a post-war civil society," he concluded.

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The United Nations is taking very seriously a report concerning human rights abuses by forces of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II), a spokesman for the Organization said today. Though characterizing the report -- issued by the African Rights organization -- as containing many spurious or hearsay charges, he stressed that if any charges were found to be true, action would be taken against those responsible.

(more)

A copy of the document had been forwarded to the Secretary-General's Special Representative Admiral Howe, who was discussing it with Force Commander General Bir and the other commanders. The spokesman pointed out that some of the allegations might already be under investigation by UNOSOM II. "You will recall that similar inquiries were conducted by the United States and Canadian contingents in the past and disciplinary action was taken when wrongdoing was established," he said.

The spokesman stressed that international efforts had led to a dramatic improvement in conditions in Somalia. "Thanks to the United Nations intervention, famine has now virtually disappeared, previously hostile political factions have negotiated a cease-fire and reconciliation agreement, and life has begun to return to normal in almost all parts of Somalia," he said.

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The peace talks between the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) in Arusha, Tanzania, have concluded, Security Council President Sir David Hannay (United Kingdom) told correspondents today. He said an agreement would probably be signed on 4 August. The talks to end the conflict in Rwanda had been underway since 16 March, with Tanzania acting in the role of facilitator.

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